

# Duxbury Clipper

SECTION  
**B**

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Section B

## What's Going On Here: Duxbury's Craftsman Renaissance, Part I

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If you have headed North on Route 3A in Duxbury anytime over the past several months, you may have noticed the reincarnation of the Delano Barn before the Marshfield line. Some people are referring to it as the old school house or the carriage house, but really it is just an extraordinary work of artisanship combining several schools of design.

Once a lonely barn whose life began sometime in the early 1700's. The owner, Orie Fontaine, saw what we now see, when it was just a wee barn off in the corner of the property.

Fontaine grew up in this area of Duxbury, on Cordwood Path, which runs through a track of land his family (Delano) has owned since it was originally granted from the King (not to be confused with Elvis) in the 1600's. The Delano land has been continuously farmed since this time, mainly with dairy cows, until H.H. Delano built some bogs in the early 1900's. He then started farming New England's contribution to the citrus fruit family, cranberries. H.H., by the way, ran a rather large veterinary hospital in Boston that was even equipped to care for circus animals. So, maybe the cranberry was a welcome diversion from all the beasts?

It is thought by some that this land may be the longest continually farmed property in the United States. The earliest settlers took over farms that



were abandoned by Indians who died in an epidemic. Yet, we don't have to go back that far to think of Duxbury as a farming community. Actually, Orie was telling me that the town was rather rural until Route 3 was built and this was in his lifetime. For old time's sake, Fontaine still farms his bogs since the cranberry crash, but he currently makes his living as an electrical contractor and craftsman.

He brings a myriad of experience to his work. As a young man he did a tour of duty in Vietnam as a machinist mate with our Navy. He ran the steam turbines on the USS Preston DD795. After this, he returned to Massachusetts and met a fellow artisan, Larry Bowser. They joined forces on a couple of building projects in Jamaica Plain, rehabbing old Victorians (houses that is).

Many of us can relate to Duxbury's special allure, an old growth Pine and Oak forest on

the Sea with four full on seasons. Orie Fontaine loves the sea and is, like many guys around here, in the middle of rehabbing his sailboat, but also he is very much a woodsman. He grew up in the woods and he even has a small working sawmill. And, I might add, on the day that we met to discuss this project, the sweet scent of pine followed him into the room.

Nighttime is especially the right time to see this new-old gem with an Osprey weathervane perched on top of the cupola. A cupola that is aglow much like a shining crown of glory. The shapes, sizes, and placements of the windows add to the overall effect. The house just looks as if it belongs there, and it is literally beaming.

Let me take you back to the beginning of this project. First things first, Fontaine paired up with an experienced businessman, Harry Todd. If this were

a play, Todd functions much as a producer would, where as Orie would be the director.

This house was constructed using a design-build method, which means it was designed as it was built. Each aspect of the house was decided as it was constructed enabling incredible detail to be added to the overall design. The priority was on integrity of the overall home rather than what is the easiest, fastest, or cheapest approach. It is similar to when a chef takes a recipe and uses it as a guideline, but isn't afraid to venture off to add a few twists to enhance the finished product.

Think of a seesaw with form and function sitting on either end, each trying to balance in the air without their feet touching the ground. This craftsman



would first relate to the space as a homeowner would. What would you want in your ideal home? The aspects of comfort, convenience and style are considered together. To this they would then apply architectural and engineering principles. In other words, how do we make this structure sound and efficient? How do we combine the best thinking in building over the past several centuries? Update the classics with modern thinking without sacrificing integrity?

One of the first tact's that he took against a current trend was to downsize his design. Just drive along Washington Street and one can see many an addi-

tions added to the old homes. Often Duxbury's newer homes are rather large in square footage too. But Fontaine thought to design this house for the baby boomer that is longing to downsize without sacrificing the ability to live in a lovely home. He saw a need for this in our community and has taken a chance. This house has two bedrooms with the possibility to sleep additional guests in a walk-in basement space. Each bedroom has its own full bath, and there is the ability to have a washer / dryer in both the basement, as well as, located in the oversized master bath.

When I first saw the barn, it was still in the way back of the one-acre property facing a hill with a sad little addition in disarray stuck on to her. Orie's brother Phil went in and stripped the barn down to the basics. At this point a crane was brought in and the old barn was placed gently out of the way in anticipation of a new foundation. The new site was forward and turned 90 degrees. After the new foundation was in, the crane again picked her up and effortlessly moved her to the spot where we now see her.

Next, there were trees to be felled because of septic and all that glamorous stuff. Have you ever seen one of these 60 plus feet Pines get the feet knocked out from under it? Even as a basic tree hugger, this process captivated me. A serious tree guy came in and it was pretty incredible, like a cowboy of the forest or what one might call a LUMBERJACK. This guy took the least amount of effort to knock the tree to exactly where he wanted it to fall.

At this point Orie imported his old partner in crime, Larry Bowser, to be the lead man. Or, if we take it back to the theatre analogy, the leading man. Larry has been commuting from his current home in Windsor Vermont, where he also owns an Inn called, The

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## Duxbury's Craftsman Renaissance

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Inn at Windsor. He is also the chairman of the board of selectman there, so he has an understanding of town business. Windsor, by the way, is the most historical town in Vermont, as it was once the capital of Vermont before it was our 14<sup>th</sup> state, when it was an independent country between 1777 and 1791. Here the Windsor principles were established which were then adopted into our constitution. They are as follows:

- The right to vote without having to own property
- Established a system of public education
- Outlawed slavery

Larry is very much a scholar of historic preservation. He and Fontaine went over the barn with a fine tooth comb, and realized that there was much more damage to the structure than they had originally suspected. As a matter of fact, over 90 percent of the barn was just not salvagable. Did this daunt our craftsmen? Of course it did, but really it was just an opportunity to solve a problem. Which is really what the design-build process is all about - creative, balanced problem solving during the building of the structure. Not always pretty, but effective nevertheless.

So now, allow me to fast forward to a recent tour of the 99 percent finished project. I joined these artisans on their front slate patio with a tour they conducted for a group of artists and art lovers from Chatham called Arts & Soul. This is a group that comes together monthly to study and enjoy the arts. They were combining this tour with a visit to the Art Complex Museum to see one of their member's work, Phil Thompson's Chatham Fog, which is a pastel included in the DAA's winter juried show.

After a review of the front entrance, which is unique with 2 handcrafted columns that are tapered at the bottom, heavy in the middle and then taper in again at the top. These columns carry an elliptical arch that houses a 9 foot fan light (window) under a copper roof. The doorway is glass with mullions in the single door and its two side panels. The fan light is still in the design process. We started inside in what was at one time the original Post and Beam barn space. This is now the living room, staircase and loft.

Fontaine and Bowser decided to redo the original structure using both local and historic materials with hand tools and methods that were employed in the 1700's. The result is a combination of hand hewed 21<sup>st</sup> century Duxbury pine beams, and hand planed wide Spruce Boards that came out of a 1765 New Hampshire home. These are used vertically as paneling. There is additional Duxbury pine to panel the ceiling and 5 inch white oak flooring. All the pegs in the construction were replaced with hand carved oak. This is all encapsulated with some modern technology in the form of stress skin panels with five-inch foam insulation and a radiant floor, making it Super energy efficient.

The interior design elements are a combination of 21-century technology together with early 1700's Colonial and the Arts & Crafts movement popularized by some forefathers you may know, such as, Frank Lloyd Wright, Gustav Stickley and Green & Green. Fontaine discovered Green & Green when he was in Southern California as they were con-

nected to the California Bungalows that are ever present in Pasadena and the city of Orange.

Our two craftsmen built wooden wall sconces with a warm apricot amber glass to light the main living room. There are glass panels of other rich jewel colors still in the structure, which were tested for use in these lamps. The hearth is granite and the fireplace brick with a wooden mantle and painted wood panel above to frame a painting. The balusters, which go up to the loft and master bedroom, are tapered posts, simple yet elegant in style.

There are a couple steps straight back and down to a dining room area, which has a mahogany deck off to the east. The dining space continues on south to the open kitchen. This kitchen is still counter-less and the pair invited the tour in on their decision making process. Orie was torn between using granite counters, which are popular today, (and also a local material), or Corian counters which he would light from below to create a luminescent feel. The tour wondered if the second idea would be possible, but Orie assured them that he had the technology as his hat as an electrical contractor exposed him to the variety of lighting that is out there. He listened attentively to all their feedback, and the jury is still out.

The kitchen is a warm creamy yellow with raised maple panels, stainless steel appliances and plenty of cabinet space. In addition, there is a walk-in pantry with a glass door, an island to house a Thermadore cook top complete with raised vent, a peninsula where stools can be pulled up to, a separate area that could be used as a desk and a back door with a patio made of tumbled field stones. The two also took advantage of copper that they had leftover from roofing the cupola and front entrance, to accent the window frames.

The Master bedroom is spacious with an ultra modern bathroom complete with a Jacuzzi and enclosed shower. The bedroom's windows are high on the walls and circumnavigate the room for maximum light, but also their height allows for the necessary wall space that one's furniture requires. These windows are trimmed with Cherry and are quite handsome. There is a walk-in closet with built ins plus. The floor is of a very knotty pine (as opposed to naughty), and there is a 200-year-old door salvaged from a Vermont farmhouse with 18<sup>th</sup> century thumb latch hardware that can be used to shut off the living and loft spaces.

There are so many special touches within the woodwork, the moldings, the beams, and the wall spaces that one really has to see them and see how they all fit together to realize the genius of these two artists / builders. The outside spaces are as well thought out as the inside, and feel as if they have been there all along. Witnessing this project from start to finish was somewhat baffling for me. I wondered how did they know that this is what would result? Actually, I asked Orie about this and he replied that when they would wonder what was the right thing to do, the many elements often led their own way. He told me that the design had been in there all along, much like how a sculpture is often trapped within the wood or rock from which it eventually emerges.

They are planning an open house this spring for members of the community to come in and have a look at this one of a kind home. Keep an eye out in the Calendar for the dates.